

][rp[Recently, anthropological work within the current of the so-called ‘ethical turn’ has begun to ~~work on understanding~~[examine](#) political processes. This includes Sian Lazar’s study of Argentine trade unionism, *The social life of politics* (2017), which employs Foucauldian notions of ethical subjectivation to describe practices of self-formation and how they link with political action. Jarrett Zigon’s latest monograph makes an original contribution to this emerging body of scholarship through an ethnography of the international anti-drug war movement.

][rp1[*A war on people* argues that through studying drug users’ experiences and the forms of political practice involved in fighting the effects of the global war on drugs, it is possible to discover a way of doing politics and enacting social change which is capable of addressing contemporary forms of governmentality and global complexity while overcoming the limitations of left-reformism, revolutionary insurrectionism, and horizontalism. For Zigon, the global war on drugs is an example of a vastly complex global phenomenon which cannot be apprehended in its totality, is assembled from diffuse social and political processes, and which manifests itself locally in diverse ways. To apprehend such a phenomenon, Zigon suggests, it is necessary to adopt a style of ethnographic method and writing that he labels ‘assemblic ethnography’. In its emphasis on tracing the continual assemblage of a phenomenon across different global scales in the course of ethnographic investigation, this is an approach that he claims is distinct from multi-sited ethnography, which prefiguratively identifies the sites through which flows and processes take place.

][rp1[Nevertheless, *A war on people* primarily deals with three localized fieldsites and organizations. These are drug user unions in the cities of Vancouver, New York, and Copenhagen. While the war on drugs manifests itself differently between these sites and the precise strategies and practices of these organizations vary, Zigon argues that they are all

engaged in combating the manner in which the drug war sets normative limits on people's ways of being in the world and produces an internal other in the form of the stigmatized figure of the 'addict'. Activists do this in part through finding ways of creatively disrupting people's preconceived notions of drug users and the drug war in order to open spaces for alternatives to it. Moreover, the anti-drug war movement is involved in building forms of non-exclusive community in which individuals are free to pursue diverse ways of being and acting, which cultivate an ethic of mutual care.

]rp1[Some fascinating examples of this sort of community described in the ethnography include Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, where the drug users' union VANDU have helped found social enterprises that employ current drug users, built housing co-operatives, and established a community bank = which also holds opera performances and at one time sold crack pipes in its lobby = open to all who arrive. Zigon contends that these instances of 'worldbuilding' establish new sources of normativity and the potentiality to transform the wider society around them. This, he concludes, serves as an example of a way of doing politics which can address other contemporary issues and how anthropology might study the emergence of possible alternatives to our present social worlds.

]rp1[For those interested in a theoretically complex and ambitious contribution to the anthropology of ethics and political anthropology, this book has much to offer. However, I wonder if some readers might be put off by the abundant use of Heideggerian phenomenological terminology as well as a less than entirely clear writing style. Moreover, it is unlikely that all will agree that Zigon has satisfactorily demonstrated some of the bold claims to theoretical and methodological novelty made in *A war on people*, such as his contention that his approach is fundamentally different from conventional multi-sited ethnography. Lastly, actual portraits of drug users, their biographies, and detailed accounts of the sites and organizations depicted in the book are limited and at times seem secondary to theoretical

discussions of the drug war, human freedom, and community. While Zigon makes clear that *A war on people* is best not understood as a conventional ethnography and does provide a number of revealing characterizations and vignettes, I think that many readers will be left disappointed at an absence of detail which might further contextualize its argument and provide textured description to this theoretically dense work. That noted, I would recommend this book to researchers and students at all levels who are interested in the anthropology of ethics and in novel approaches to fieldwork methodology and political anthropology, as well as to anyone seeking ethnographic studies of the global war on drugs.

]rau[MATTHEW DOYLE

*University of Sussex*